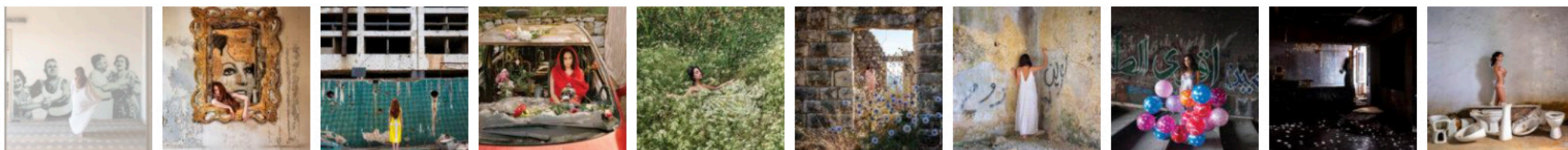


Galerie Tanit : Rania Matar : Where Do I Go? Fifty Years Later



Aya (Dancing), Gemmayze, Beirut, Lebanon, 2022© Rania Matar



JEAN-JACQUES NAUDET - APRIL 10, 2025

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Lebanese Civil War that began on April 13, 1975, **Rania Matar** is presenting an exhibition entitled ***Where Do I Go, 50 Years Later*** at the **Galerie Tanit** in Beirut. She writes :

2025 marks the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War. As we reach this symbolic date, Lebanon still suffers its consequences. The past 5 years, conditions have deteriorated fast, especially after the August 4, 2020 Port of Beirut explosions and all that has ensued.

However, and through it all, I always found hope and inspiration in the women. I have previously dedicated my work to exploring issues of personal and collective identity through photographs of female adolescence and womanhood in both the United States where I live, and in Lebanon where I am from to highlight our shared humanity. In this body of work, I chose to collaborate with women in Lebanon specifically. The work became more personal. I see my younger self in these women. I was twenty when I left Lebanon in 1984 during the Civil War, to go study in the United States, in what had been the largest wave of emigration until recently. Many find themselves at that same juncture as they face the painful decision in determining whether to stay or leave: one road leading to separation from family, home and life as they know it, the other staying despite the fraught conditions in the country, always holding on to hope for better days.

I saw graffiti on the wall that said in Arabic: “Where do I go” لوين روح. I was with Perla, a young woman who threw herself on that wall. It became the title of this body of work.

The project kept evolving over the past years, as I invited more women to tell their story through our collaboration. Together we explored their relationship to the different aspects and textures of Lebanon. Each photograph is personal and has a narrative. The women, the land, the architecture are intertwined. I portray the raw beauty of their age, their individuality, physicality, texture, and mystery. I photograph them the way I, a woman and a mother, see them: beautiful, alive. The process is collaborative, and the photo session evolves organically as the women become active participants in the image-making process, presiding over the environment, and making it their own. They climb on rocks and trees, jump fully dressed in dirty water and waterfalls, crawl under thorns, trespass into abandoned buildings, embracing life not afraid of getting dirty, taking risks and having fun. Given the space to express themselves, they are willing to experiment and go places neither of us thought possible just moments earlier. Just like living in Lebanon, we embrace the element of risk-taking and danger. It is part of who we are. It's in our DNA.

I find myself focusing on their strength and their majestic presence.

The collaboration is intense, creative, emotional, and personal. The need to hold on to creativity and self-expression feels urgent.

While my photographs may not provide solutions, I hope they nevertheless invite the viewer to pause and find the beauty, the (shared) humanity, and the grace that still exist despite all. They are my love letters to the women of Lebanon. This project is for us all: the ones who stayed and the ones who have left but can never leave.

The last two photos of Barbie Girl are also included in the exhibition. They are the same young woman photographed 18 years apart: after the 2006 war (she was 1 year old) when her aunt's house was destroyed, and then again in 2024 (I found it by accident on Instagram). She is now 19 years old and her aunt's house has been destroyed again!

Rania Matar